

A Page of Interesting Short Stories

The Captain Who Capitulated

By Elsie Endicott

LL the long June morning the man had lurked in the chaparral thick above the Mount Wilson trail. Since 7 o'clock he had lain sprawled in the scanty shade gazing idly down at the panorama of the valley, but as the soft tinkle of the Pasadena church bells came up to him he roused and drew a watch from an inside pocket. "Eleven," he muttered. "Pretty near that time," he arose and stood a full six feet of rags and dirt.

The man walked up the mountain side a few yards to where two rangy black horses pawed impatiently. After tightening the loosened cinches he replaced the bits in the horses' mouths and turned his attention to the half mile curve of trail below. Catching a glimpse of moving figures, he pulled a pair of field glasses from his pocket and adjusted the focus. His magnified vision centered for a moment upon half a dozen khaki clad girls swinging up the brown ribbon of the trail. The man hung the glasses conveniently upon a saddle horn and rolled a cigarette. Again he let his eyes wander

over the deep green of the orange groves and the checkerboard map of Pasadena, letting them come to rest on the tall downtown buildings of Los Angeles.

"If this goes through all right," he mused, "I won't be in Los Angeles again for two months, but if I make a slip-up, I'll have a room in the county's Temple street hotel tonight."

The party of girls passed his hiding place and climbed, laughing and yelling toward the Mount Wilson summit. Suddenly the watcher stiffened and raised his glasses as a party of four came into view around the point. One look caused his indecision to vanish. "They're coming," he remarked to his horse, and swung into the saddle.

Quitting his nervous mount, he watched the approaching party with a queer, strained expression upon his face. His gaze passed over the man in the lead and also alighted the man's young woman who followed him. He glared for a moment at the angular, middle-aged woman who was next in the file, then fastening his gaze upon the girl, he murmured, "Why, I'm Mrs. Morgan. These are my daughter and her husband, and my little girl. Kindly come along with us."

The lady with the trouble breeding face was becoming frightened. "Why, I'm Mrs. Morgan. These are my daughter and her husband, and my little girl. Kindly come along with us."

hatchet-faced woman farther up the trail and farther away from the "little girl." The horseman still facing the woman, forced the led horse down toward the girl.

"You can't fool me," he snarled. "You're Mrs. Morgan. You're worth fourteen millions. I'm Black Steve, the outlaw. I'm going to kidnap your daughter and hold her for a million ransom."

He pulled his coat aside that the woman might see his gun. As he did so he glanced up the trail and saw the married daughter and her husband seated on a rock. Their interest was so evident that the outlaw nearly forgot his fear-inspiring pose. To save the situation he turned hastily to the girl. "Get up!" he commanded, ignoring the mother, whose screams were taking on a triumphant note of understanding.

The girl proved to be perfectly at home in the saddle and for a time it looked as if she had a chance to escape by racing away from her captor. She urged the horse on with vicious digs of her tiny, spurless heels, but the heavy Sunday travel on the trail made great speed impossible. Several times she glanced over her shoulder and shuddered as she glimpsed that grimy, terrifying figure. Once

she made an attempt to slacken her pace, but the man shouted a gruff warning and waved her on.

The girl uttered an exclamation of disgust. "I didn't think even a kidnaper could be quite so dirty," she sniffed, reining her horse to the farther side of the road. "Mother is apt to have you hung for this."

"Have to catch us first," the other suggested laconically.

"I saw a mounted man when we started. A forest man, maybe?" "Yes," he was plainly alarmed. "That's bad. If he gets down and starts an automobile after us it's all off. Let's ride."

His audaciousness was enough to quiet any remonstrance on the part of the girl. Again she forced her horse into the long, pounding gallop. The outlaw was scowled, and as they neared the outskirts of Pasadena, he threw many anxious glances back up the boulevard. Suddenly he straightened and faced the front with desperate determination. "They're coming!" he shouted. "We'll turn—first street—on left."

The girl looked back and saw, far behind, a tiny black speck against the background of dust. Her nerves tingled, the spirit of the race gripped her, she coaxed her horse to greater ef-

fort, straining her eyes to pick up ahead the sheltering side street.

"There, it is!" yelled her captor. "Just beyond that big pepper."

They turned into the narrow lane-like street, dashed to the next corner and swung to the right, coming to a halt in the protection of an orange grove. Silently they peered down between two rows. Would their ruse succeed?

A popping roar grew to a climax of explosive exhaust as a long, dark shape flashed across the lane between the tree rows. The prisoner smiled weakly at her captor, who grinned in reply as he mopped his perspiring face with a clean white handkerchief.

"That was a close call," he groaned. "But we're safe. They'll never get you now."

"Don't be too sure," defied the girl. "You're altogether too confident a villain."

The other laughed good naturedly. "See that?" He pointed to a church steeple several blocks down the street. "Well, let's go."

They rode on, stopping at a little bungalow beside the church. "Here's where things happen," chuckled the man. "Here's where I say good-bye to the little girl I captured on the Mount Wilson trail. Come on. Let's be

brave."

Reluctantly the girl dismounted and walked up the gravel path beside the outlaw, who grinned derisively at his shrinking companion.

The door was opened by a gray-haired man.

"You the minister?" questioned the tramp-like caller.

The old man nodded, staring in wonder at the strangely contrasting couple.

"Well, we'd like to get married. We want you to marry us."

"Why—er—but you must have a license."

"I know. I got it last night."

"But—the minister's startled gaze shot to the girl—"do you—do you—my dear young lady, do you really wish to marry this—this unclean person?"

The girl laughed merrily. "Oh, Frank doesn't look like that when he's washed and dressed. Of course, I want to marry him. We've been engaged three years and I'm of age now—and mother has kept us apart long enough. Of course, I'm going to marry him."

And with a gesture of infinite trust the dainty little prisoner snuggled up close against the filthy rags of her captor.

With the Benefit of Style

By Will Seaton

BEFORE John had read an article on dress reform, he had thought his wife the most attractive woman in the world.

After reading the article and pondering deeply thereon, he decided that things were all wrong, at least in so far as his wife's clothes were concerned. Also, he resolved that a change must be brought about. Therefore it was with just a hint of severity that he opened the subject on the evening following his perusal of the article.

"Miriam," said he, "I have been thinking a good deal about the way the modern woman dresses."

Miriam looked up from her sewing with a tender smile. Secure in the consciousness of perfection in her husband's eyes, she could afford to be generous with the faults of other women.

"Yes," she replied, encouragingly. "And I've come to the conclusion that these thin, filmy blouses; these low necks and short sleeves are injurious

to the health. They throw the weight of the entire body onto the ball of the foot and the pressure reacts upon the nerves in such a way as to hurt the eyes. In time—"

"Goodness, John," laughed Miriam. "Where did you get all those ideas? You've been reading something!"

"Yes, I have. And I agree absolutely with what I have read. Women's clothes are all wrong, and I am going to insist that you, at least, dress sensibly in the future. I want my wife to look like a woman—not a public exhibition!" And laying aside his paper he glared defiance across the table.

"John Foster! An exhibition! Indeed. When, may I ask, have I been that?"

"Well, I didn't mean that you had, purposely at any rate," John conceded. "You have only dressed as all the others do, and we have all become so accustomed to seeing these things that we think nothing of it. I mean simply, that if you want to please me that you will dress as modestly as possible in the future. But I shall insist upon no more high heels or low necks. The other things you may use your discretion about. I believe you said something about getting some new things

next week? I shall expect to see a radical change. And I am sure you will agree with me after you have tried out my ideas."

Miriam's eyes twinkled mischievously. "Yes, dear," she said meekly. "I'm sure we shall agree after we've tried it out."

And John retired feeling very well satisfied with his position as the head of the house.

Next morning Miriam telephoned to three friends whose husbands belonged to John's club. They met at Miriam's for luncheon, and there was much laughing over what appeared to be a huge joke. And that night at dinner John again congratulated himself upon the docility of his wife.

"I got my suit today, John," she said, "and some shoes."

"Good!" beamed John as he carved the steak. "Get something nice!"

"O, yes, dear. It's very nice. Plain blue, but nice quality. I can't show you because it is being altered. And I had to get some new waisis since you don't like my thin ones. I shall have them all tomorrow. Couldn't you meet me in town for dinner somewhere?"

"Fine. Make it a quarter to six. Be on time and perhaps we can go some-

where afterward."

Punctual to the moment John entered the waiting room and glanced about. Miriam had not arrived and he was with a sense of pleasure that he sat down to await her coming. Miriam was not a pretty girl, he told himself comfortably, but there was something irresistible about her. She knew how to wear her clothes; that was it! Now there are some women and they would not look well if they had all Paris to put on their backs. Dowdy—that was the word to describe them. For instance, that girl over there! How unattractive she looked and yet her clothes were good! Now the other women in the room looked nifty! Yes, sir. Those high, light-colored boots were sure classy, and he did like those big, floppy hats. Now, Miriam—

But here his soliloquy was rudely interrupted. Unnoticed by him "that girl over there" had approached and was standing before him.

"Hello, dear," she said, sweetly. "I've been here 10 minutes. Didn't you see me?"

Like a man suddenly awakened from a pleasant dream John sat up and gaped. So great was his astonishment that he forgot to rise and sat

staring at his wife with an expression of amazement very funny to behold.

"Well, how do you like my suit?" she asked brightly. "It's just what you wanted!"

Slowly John's eyes took in every detail of the costume, from the high-necked linen shirtwaist to the clumsy, broad-toed, low-heeled shoes which showed beneath the long, graceful skirt.

"It is very neat," he murmured politely. "Very neat indeed. Er—shall we eat here, or go out somewhere?"

"Here, of course," said Miriam decidedly, and led the way to their usual table.

With her coat off she looked worse than with it on. High collars did not suit Miriam's short, plump neck, and she looked choky and uncomfortable. John felt somehow as if a trick were being played on him—the way he was sure a fellow feels who has just purchased a gold brick. But the dinner was unusually good and Miriam was so entertaining as ever, albeit not so good to look at, and all was progressing nicely when the arrival of a party of six at a near-by table attracted their attention.

"Why, it's the girls!" exclaimed Miriam in pleased surprise, and in a mo-

ment she and John had joined the jolly group. Ordinarily John enjoyed anything like this, but tonight he was keenly conscious of the dowdy appearance Miriam made among these daintily dressed women, whose filmy blouses and low necks seemed eminently the proper thing. Savagely he cursed the day when he had "bitten in" on his wife's affairs. And the worst of it was that she seemed utterly unconscious of her drab appearance. A cold horror gripped him. While if she should refuse to give up her homely, comfortable clothes and go back to "fussing!" Thoughts of never again seeing the pretty, stylish figure, as he had so loved to see it, filled him with hopeless rage. "Whoever wrote that article is a boob," he muttered savagely, "and I was worse than a fool to swallow it!"

But all things have an end, and at last the dread evening was over and they were at home.

"It has been such a happy evening," sighed Miriam. "And I am not the least bit tired. These nice broad shoes are so comfortable. I just patted the girls in those high boots. And I'm an glad you like my suit, dear. I always want to please you, you know."

This was the last straw, and John's

E watched her as she worked, her sure slender fingers dancing over the keys, her gray eyes open intent, as she listened to the voice from the dictaphone. Spring was abroad in the city streets, the air of the office was warm and oppressive, and work was hard that day. And he noticed with a little shock of pain the shadows under her eyes and the faint hollows in her cheeks.

For two years Beth had worked at that desk in plain sight of Jimmie Torrence, but today he saw her in a new light. He had loved her from the day when she first came into the office, loved her in silence, worshipped her from afar.

After all, he thought, it was a hard life for a girl to live, and he pictured her in a little home, away from the driving forces of the business world, in a sunny window seat, all framed in flowers, a baby upon her knees, perhaps. But love and marriage were not for Jimmie, and he put the picture out of his mind. Even if his invalid

mother had not first claim upon him, even if he had been in position to offer Beth everything, what reason had he to hope that she would look at him then? She was popular in the office, and his own chance seemed small.

As the girl looked up and met his gaze with her sweet and patient smile a great resolution took shape in Jimmie's brain. He would wait for Beth that very night, he would tell her of his love. Even if his case was hopeless it would not harm Beth to know that he cared for her.

Slowly that afternoon wore away. As the hands of the clock crept toward 6 a sort of panic seized Jimmie. He set his teeth together as he put away his books. "I will do it!" he told himself, though the cold drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead.

Just then Mr. Morton rushed toward his private office. A minute later he opened the door and called: "Torrence, come here!" As Jimmie obeyed the summons he saw Beth start for the dressing-room and his heart sank. The boss was shoving some papers into his hands. "Get those statements out early tomorrow and mail them to me at Chicago. Here's the address."

Where's that office boy? Torrence, will you put a cylinder on this machine. I've got to dictate a letter before I go. All right."

He sat down and his big voice boomed into the receiver. "Put that where it will be attended to first thing in the morning, and look up after me." He grabbed his hat and coat and was gone.

Jimmie sank dejectedly into the chair he had vacated and stared absently at the cylinder on the machine. Suddenly his relaxed form stiffened as if galvanized. He had a big idea. Carefully he adjusted a perfectly new and smooth cylinder to the machine and took up the dictating tube. Had Jimmie stood face to face with Beth the chances are he would have appeared at his very worst. But, freed from any restraint, he spoke from his heart. "Dear Miss Andrews—Dear Little Girl: I have tried today to find an opportunity of speaking to you. I have waited and hoped all day, only to be disappointed tonight. So when you hear this in the morning I hope you will understand and not be less kind because I have taken this way of addressing you."

"I love you, Beth. I have loved you since the day when you first came into this room. At first I thought that in a few months or a year, at most I would be in a position to ask for your love. I do not know whether you have noticed that others have been promoted over me and that I have only held my own. Sometimes I fear I am a failure. God knows I have tried hard to make good, but you see what success I have had. Perhaps if I had gone away and tried my luck in other

fields I might have done better, but my poor mother has been an invalid for years and depended upon me, so I have not dared to take the chances that other men may take."

"Dear girl I never meant to tell you all this. You always seemed so bright and happy that I felt I had no right to trouble you with my unavailing love. But lately I have seen in your eyes a shadow of trouble or worry and then I knew that I must speak. If there is any comfort to you in knowing that there is one who loves you and who would give his life to shield you from any trouble, that comfort is yours."

"My love is all that I can offer you now, dear. But if you care for me a little, if you can give me any hope, it would be happiness unexpressed for me to know that we are waiting and working together and that I might share your troubles and anxieties. Will you meet me tomorrow, Beth? I shall look for you at the door. Sincerely yours, JAMES TORRENCE."

When he had heard the record through Mr. Morton's lever back in his chair and laughed. It was a very kindly laugh, however, and was fol-

lowed by a few minutes of deep study. When he came out of that he laughed again and excitedly slapped his knee. "I do it," he chuckled.

Beth Andrews came in next morning and took her place with her usual cheery smile. After she adjusted the headpiece over her pretty head she listened intently as a new voice came to her. Then her eyes grew misty and her cheeks burned red. As the last word died away she turned her eyes to Jimmie's desk, but he was just disappearing into the private office. The whirl of blank spaces ran on for a minute and she heard the familiar boom of Mr. Morton's voice.

"My Dear Miss Andrews: Permit me to add a few words to the foregoing letter. From what I know of James Torrence, I do not hesitate to say that he is worthy of the love of any good woman and I believe that he would make an ideal husband. Since the foregoing letter was dictated his prospects have greatly improved. I have planned to have Mr. Burns take charge of our new branch in Chicago; his place here to be filled by Mr. Torrence."

"Mr. Torrence will receive a salary of \$1,000 per year and I am sure he

can afford to marry on that, especially if he wins for a wife such an estimable and sensible young woman as yourself. Very truly yours, "G. B. MORTON."

Beth could not understand it all. She pulled the headpiece from her head and looked widely about. The office boy stood at her elbow.

"Mr. Morton wants to see you, miss," he said.

Beth made her way to the private office, where the boss sat talking with Jimmie. Mr. Morton's eyes twinkled as he rose.

"I believe Mr. Torrence wishes to see you—ah—in regard to some correspondence. Mr. Torrence, you understand, is to be the new manager of this office." He walked out and closed the door.

"Jimmie Torrence!" gasped Beth. "What does it all mean?"

"It means—stammered Jimmie, very red and uncomfortable—"why, it means—Beth could you ever learn to care for me?"

"Care for you?" she cried. "Oh, Jimmie Torrence, I have loved you all ways, always!"

When the Weight Rolled Off

By Walt Gregg

POSTCARRIER PETER BENT did not mind the heat of the sultry August morning as his dappled gray mare ambled lazily along the country road, stopping unbidden while her master climbed out and deposited the mail in the little tin mail boxes along the route.

His mind was about a mile farther down the road, at the little gray cottage where lived his sunny-haired sweetheart, Nora, who in just two weeks' time was to be his wife.

Peter's heart beat quick under his blue shirt as he thought of the little house he had waiting for her, and which made the gray home of her childhood appear more faded and weatherworn than ever.

But what a time he had had to win her, this willful, mischievous sweetheart of his. Even now, with the wed-

ding day only two weeks off he hardly dared breathe freely, for there was danger that he might lose her at the last minute.

Even Peter's best friends could not call him handsome, and he attached no blame to Nora because her fancy had turned to handsome Ned Gallagher, two years before. Peter winced even now as he recalled the pain it had cost him when he learned that she had promised to marry that scapegrace, or at least to wait a year for him, while he went West to make good. Well, the year and almost another was up, and for months Nora had not heard a word. Still she had hoped on, but after a time she had been forced to conclude that he had forgotten her, and then she had accepted Peter's attentions, wondering that she was not more hurt at Ned's inconstancy.

After she had promised to marry Peter, plain, honest Peter, she had learned to care for him as everyone did who knew him, but Peter had always a haunting fear that Ned might

return and claim her, and he wished with all his heart for the day when he himself could claim her.

Musing on these things, he drew nearer her house and began to search through his bag for the mail for her. He smiled tenderly as he noted the several letters addressed to her. They would be "joy-letters," as she called them, or notes wishing her happiness, and she would read them to him when he came that evening.

Suddenly the smile died and his face turned ashy gray under his sunburn as he came upon a letter addressed in a dashing hand to "Miss Nora S. R. F. D. No. 7, East Hamstead, Maine," and bearing in the upper left-hand corner the words, "From Edward Gallagher, Phoenix, Arizona." Those five words made all the difference between darkness and daylight to Peter Bent.

So he was going to put in an appearance, was he? After a silence of over a year, he was going to turn up and expect to find her waiting for him.

The worst of it was, Peter could not quite convince himself that perhaps he wouldn't be welcome if he came back. He was so good looking, so winning, but such a ne'er-do-well, but somehow a woman could never see that.

Peter sat staring fixedly ahead of him, mindful of the inquiring gaze of Molly, the old mare, at whose reins he had jerked abruptly when he saw the letter, and who was waiting vainly for the signal to go on. But Peter was not ready to go on.

The greatest temptation of his life had him in its grip, and he was fighting it desperately. How easy it would be to destroy that letter and not deliver it. Nora would never know, and if Ned waited for an answer and even wrote again, by the time a second letter arrived from Arizona she would be his wife and it would be too late for him to take her away.

Peter fought with himself grimly, and it was an hour later before Molly, the mare, again went down the road.

only this time it was not at a lazy walk, but at an awkward canter, surprised by the unusual sensation of having the whip flicked over her.

Nora was standing by the gate, gazing anxiously up the road, when they came around the corner.

"Why, Peter, dear, I began to think you must have been overcome by the sun—you're over an hour late. And me here, waiting for you this long time!" Then, as he drew nearer and she caught sight of his white, drawn face, she cried, "Peter, you are sick. Tell me what's the trouble."

Dumbly Peter held out the letter for her, the one from Arizona on top. "Here's your mail," he said, simply.

Nora, amazed at his manner and appearance, took it mechanically and then looked startled as she saw that the letter was from her former suitor.

"Oh, Peter," she cried pitifully, not offering to open it, "a letter from Ned. I don't want to read it. Oh, why need he write now, when I am so happy. Why couldn't it have been some

other time?" She burst into tears, and threw herself into Peter's arms.

"Peter, he couldn't make me marry him now, could he? I know I promised, but it's been so long, and I love you so. Oh, Peter, couldn't we be married right now so if he should come back it would be too late for him to get me?"

His last doubt of her love for him removed, Peter breathed again.

"Read it," he urged. "Of course he can't get you. This is a free country, dear, and if you love me, I'd like to see the man that could take you from me."

Obediently Nora opened the letter and skimmed the contents. Then with a cry of joy she passed the letter to Peter to read.

"He doesn't want me, glory be, Peter, he doesn't want me any more than I want him. He's married someone else out West. Oh, glory, Peter, such a load has rolled off my mind!"

And Peter, realizing that if he had withheld the letter, he would not have seen this evidence of her love for him,